



## SOLDIERS

From 1830 to 1852, the Royal Danish West Indian Troops at Christiansted consisted of an infantry company, an artillery detachment, military staff, and support troops. A total of 218 officers and men were allocated on paper, although the actual figure often proved far less. Danish military strength was supplemented by locally raised militia units.

The presence of royal troops was intended to deter slave uprisings and attacks on commercial shipping by pirates and privateers. In practical terms, their duties were largely ceremonial, in keeping with the town's status as capital of the Danish West Indies.

Danish soldiers who had successfully completed their training and initial service could volunteer for the West Indian Troops. Privates and non-commissioned officers were obligated to serve six years of duty. Records from the 1830s and 1840s indicate that lower ranking soldiers were invariably Lutherans and unmarried, usually came from a rural setting, and averaged 5'4" in height. Officers, who came from the upper middle class and the nobility, tended to be rather taller.

For many of these Danes, the glamour of soldiering in the tropics must have been short lived. Unaccustomed to the tropical heat and humidity, troops sweltered in stylish but impractical wool uniforms similar to those worn in Denmark. It has been estimated that a soldier on guard duty carried over 35 pounds of clothing, arms, and equipment. Further more, soldiers on night guard duty were required to wear a double breasted wool greatcoat "to ward off the chill of the night air."

Unlike officers, the diet of the lower ranks was poor. Their food was, in reality, only minimally better than that which was provided for the slaves. A low pay rate of 13 cents a day in 1849, on par with the newly-freed field hands on the plantations left little opportunity to improve matters by private means.

These factors, along with communal dormitories, contributed to an approximately, 10 percent mortality rate among Danish soldiers on St. Croix in any given year. The most common cause of death was yellow fever, although alcohol abuse occurs consistently in small percentages. Mortality could exceed 70 percent in epidemic years.

In a highly stratified colonial society, lower ranking Danish soldiers found little common ground among the white civilian population. Common-law relationships with local black women were not infrequent. The continued existence of some Scandinavian surnames locally may have their origins in this social setting.

In spite of these hardships and deprivations, the great majority of Danish troops here discharged their military obligations faithfully and with honor.